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Most Umno divisions mum on choice of new DPM

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IN a week's time, all 165 Umno divisions, including the Wanita, Youth and Puteri movements will have concluded their annual general meetings.

Some 30 divisions began their meetings early this month, with more than 40 having concluded their meetings last weekend and another 80 more due next week.

Umno set aside last month for some 19,000 branches to hold their annual general meetings and April for the divisions.

The party elections, originally due this year, were postponed to enable Umno to concentrate on the general election.

This is not an (party) election year. Still, resolutions have been made and or will be to set the tone for the general assembly in June. The meetings will also elect delegates to the general assembly.

The top six leaders in each division together with the seven elected at divisional meetings qualify as delegates.

As this is not an election year, Umno division meetings have been rather quiet save for some unofficial discussions on the successor to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as Deputy Prime Minister.

Most have not made a pitch for their candidate, as a wrong move at this time could well sink their political future, but some division leaders have either hinted or openly supported their preferred candidate in their opening speeches.

Such open declaration was made by a division head in Perak, another in Kuala Lumpur and a Youth division head in Negri Sembilan.

So far, a party insider said, other divisions have avoided this for resolutions focusing on the economy, education and the party's well-being.

"The meetings went off smoothly. Except for one or two cases, we are satisfied with the ongoing division meetings," said Umno executive secretary Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor.

Johor Baru deputy division head Datuk Khalid Nordin said in politics, it was typical for some members to manoeuvre for political position and to posture.

"This is only normal. Some of the division heads will propose candidates for the position of Deputy Prime Minister. But I think Umno leaders are mature enough."

But one division head said such open declaration was not healthy. The group had ignored Abdullah's advice to stop dwelling on the issue.

"This simply shows that wise words and advice alone are insufficient. It does appear that generally, the advice and instruction seem not well heeded.

"If members choose to ignore advice from the party leaders and instead pursue their personal interest, then the threat to party unity becomes more real and will definitely have a long-term negative impact on the party.

"But thank God, it has not sparked a series of declarations from other divisions as well."

To this, vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib said: "Let's not forget about fate, the mysterious force which is supposed to be the cause of all events, one that is beyond human control.

"What is destined to be yours, nobody will be able to take it away. Leave it to Allah and work hard for the party."

Other resolutions, which inevitably fuelled speculation, were from the

Kota Baru division which proposed that the task of selecting candidates for the general election be given to grassroots party members, and the Tawau division calling on Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to withdraw his decision to step down.

Last Saturday, the Pendang Umno division came up with a resolution asking Dr Mahathir to be retained as Umno president after he steps down as Prime Minister in October and there was even a resolution asking a certain wakil rakyat to be retained in the next election.

The Wanita and Youth division meetings went smoothly with most of the resolutions concentrated on Islamic education and the country's economy in view of the economic fallout from the war in Iraq and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.

Other than these, the Kepala Batas and Batu Pahat Puteri Umno divisions proposed that the age limit for the movement's top post be scrapped with immediate effect as at present, any woman who is 40 and above cannot contest the post of Puteri chief.

Muhammad Taib said although there were about more than 100 resolutions, the party's resolution committee headed by Datuk Seri Najib Razak with the Umno liaison committee head would study them and select those to be tabled in the assembly in June.

It will be interesting to see what else is in store with only 80 divisions left to conclude their meetings by next weekend.

Observers within and without the party will be watching to see how many more divisions come up with other interesting resolutions or declarations.

The question is: how many members are mature enough to put the party's interest above self?